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For SALT that works

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We are on the side of the majority of Americans who favor agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union to limit and eventually reduce the nuclear weapon arsenals of each nation.

We share a degree of suspicion of the world aims of the Soviet Union, but we believe the United States must cope with those aims with more conventional defenses and diplomacy and political skill. And, of course, a strong economy and a continuing emphasis on innovation and technical advance.

The SALT II treaty now nearing completion should be endorsed by the Senate unless there is clear and uncontrovertible evidence that the treaty would undermine our ability to defend ourselves and retaliate swiftly and effectively.

That the current debate on the treaty now centers on verification encourages us to believe that the basic terms of the treaty do not favor the Soviet Union over the United States. The concern, rather, centers on whether the concessions made by the Soviet Union will be made and whether limits proposed will be observed.

Mr. Carter made an absolute statement Wednesday that the United States will be able to quickly detect cheating and effectively respond to any cheating. Opponents dispute that capability, citing most often the loss of close-in spy stations in Iran. CIA and Defense Department spokesmen have conceded a loss of capability. Their versions of how long it will take to recover lost surveillance vary from one year (Defense) to five years (CIA).

So some doubt exists on verification as of today. But those who should know indicate the Soviet Union is living up to at least the letter of SALT I terms. There is no obvious reason to believe the Soviets would breach SALT II.